**Cool Tool Reviews**

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I attended the screen-casting workshop on “Screencast-O-Matic” given by Hiller Spires. Screencast-O-Matic is a Web 2.0 tool that provides a platform to add audio to describe what is on your computer’s screen. I could see many applications. At my high school, I could see teachers or peer tutors helping ELL/ESL students learn how to navigate instructional web sites by using this program. I could also see utilizing this to give additional support to students who are auditory and visual learners. Screen casting can facilitate professional development by giving additional support to teachers who are trying to access new information or learn new instructional software. I would also implement this to teach parents how to utilize various on-line supports such as grade programs, registrations, data warehouses, or even library catalogues. Our school district is trying to provide increased access to information for teachers and students.

Attending the iMovie workshop was valuable since we utilized this same program for our dyad’s project this week. iMovie is a software program program developed by Apple that allows users to easily download and edit video or images and create “movies.” I learned how to add music to the iMovie program. There are countless ways to utilize iMovie in a school setting. I am definitely going to utilize it to create quick promotional messages to get students to visit the library or learn about new library resources. I will also post the iMovies on the library’s web site. Faculty and parents will find out about resources and events in the library. I would like to have students utilize iMovie to make book trailers, commercials for the library’s services, and to promote events at the library (e.g. Teen Read Week, author readings, etc).

I was thrilled to learn about Storybird and its power to make digital storytelling accessible to students of all ages. Storybird is a program that allows the user to select images from an image library and then add words to create a digital storybook. I could imagine so many applications for this cool tool. Elementary students could create their own digital stories. They could even do this in foreign languages to learn Spanish for example. I also could imagine the older students creating books for the Kindergarten students and being a reading “buddies” with them. Students could share their books with “pen pal” students in other countries.

The session on Storify proved to be very valuable since I could see an immediate application in a group project. Storify is an on-line tool that allows users to curate a “story” collecting artifacts from various social media sources such as Twitter and Facebook. Storify allows a user to bring their perspective to an issue or event by selecting information from social network sources. Storify has the ability to take social networks and to connect them via the power of stories rather than isolated posts. I could imagine utilizing this with teachers for their own PLNs (Personal Learning Networks) by giving them a template to connect different sources to their interest or “story.” I could also see students in high school utilizing this tool as a presentation tool for a traditional “Current Event” topic paper. This application adds an element of relevancy that perhaps a traditional paper would not contain. I could also appreciate students in forensics or debate utilizing Storify to prepare for their formal presentations in a new and interesting way.

Symbaloo is an on-line tool that aggregates your web sites (and RSS feeds) into a unique and visual collection. Symbaloo provides “tiles” that give the user easy access to favorite web sites. I immediately started utilizing this as a teacher to create a Personal Learning Environment to find the tools that I use to stay abreast of school libraries (my field). I also could imagine collaborating with teachers to create a Symbaloo to introduce a unit in social studies for example. I could also see asking students to create their own Symbaloo to organize themselves similar to a student agenda and an on-line backpack. They could create tiles for school web sites, turn-it-in.com, ACT, football web sites, weather channels, etc. Students might also want to utilize a Symbaloo to create a presentation for a project.

Infogr.am is an on-line tool providing digital visualization of information and data. Use Infogr.am in professional development as a way to represent data such as test scores to teachers. It could also provide a “picture” of information such as surveys. Visualization of statistics is a very powerful tool in education data. Students could utilize this tool in social studies courses when they have to compare and contrasts cultures and countries. I could also imagine math classes incorporating the creation of infographs into curriculum to give a way for students to visualize statistics in a more interesting manner. I could also see journalism students using Infogr.am to represent student opinions or voices.

The tool that I would utilize with students is Storybird. I chose Storybird because it has a simple interface that is very accessible to learners of all ages and all abilities. Because of that possibility, I chose to plan a lesson that I could use with high school ELL/ESL students. I would collaborate with our ELL teacher to teach this lesson on creating stories across cultures. The lesson plan, “Creating Cultures across Cultures” would utilize Storybird as a publishing platform. Students would need to have some skill with keyboarding in order to write their stories. Therefore, I would suggest that they utilize Typingweb.com (one example) if they lack keyboarding skills.

Students would first brainstorm about their stories. Teacher could give writing prompts such as my favorite birthday as a child, my favorite pet, something my mother/grandmother shared with me, or possibly tell about a favorite holiday in their culture. The teacher would ask students to fill out a paper graphic organizer. The teacher could go over these with students and encourage students to use new vocabulary.

Students would create accounts with Storybird. Teachers can actually make class accounts as well. The students would then select artwork that would best visually represent the story that they have selected to share. Next, they would select art on Storybird and write story as they go through this process. They would incorporate new vocabulary words in English. They could then publish these stories both on-line and possibly as print PDF files. Writers can even order printed books for a fee. I would encourage these students to share with their families particularly younger siblings. If possible, I might arrange for high school students to visit a local elementary school and share these stories with younger students.